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House Education Committee

Testimony on House Bill 96

Kevin Duff, Executive Vice President, Ohio Excels

March 4, 2025

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, my name is Kevin Duff, and I am the Executive Vice President at Ohio Excels. Ohio Excels is a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization that engages and unites Ohio's business community on the full education-to-workforce pipeline, from early childhood, K-12, higher education, and into the workforce. We convene coalitions, conduct research, work with schools and community partners, and advocate for solutions that improve educational outcomes for all Ohio students.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 96 (HB 96). My colleague, Cassie Palsgrove, will be testifying after me on behalf of the Career-Connected Learning Coalition that we facilitate. To save time, we've agreed to take questions jointly after she presents the coalition's proposal.

Literacy Implementation

The previous budget showed an incredible commitment by the Governor and General Assembly to improving literacy in Ohio's schools by embracing the science of reading. While it is too early to see achievement scores jump, we do have early indicators of implementation success. A new poll by Ohio Excels found that 57% of parents have noticed changes in the way reading is taught in their child's school, and 43% of parents reported that their child is receiving additional reading support.

The evidence is clear that educators are stepping up to the challenge. We need to keep this momentum going. We are happy to see a continued investment of \$12M in each year of the biennium for literacy coaches to support educators as they implement the science of reading in schools and districts with the lowest reading proficiency rates.

Math Improvement

While literacy efforts continue, it is time to start looking at math. The proficiency rates in math are even lower than reading. Working with stakeholder groups including the Alliance for High Quality Education, Fordham, and others, we have identified two policies that will help ensure more students have access to advanced math and that new educators are prepared to teach math.

First, we believe that all *new* elementary and middle school teachers should be required to demonstrate a minimum level of competency in math before leading math instruction in the classroom. Teacher candidates that do not reach a minimum math score can still get a license, but they cannot lead math instruction.

Second, we believe that schools should be required to enroll all students who score Accomplished or Advanced on the state's 7th-grade math test into Algebra I in 8th grade unless a parent chooses to opt out. Schools would still have discretion to enroll additional students in Algebra I in 8th grade using local measures and teacher judgement. We have about 10,000 to 12,000 students statewide who are high performing and ready to advance in their math pathway but are not enrolled in Algebra I. The head start provided by this proposal would give students more time in high school to pursue advanced math coursework aligned to their postsecondary plans, such as statistics, career-technical education courses, and computer science.

Computer Science

Computer science skills are critical for students to be successful in an ever changing economy. Our new poll found that 89% of Ohioans believe all schools should be required to offer a computer science course or coursework to students. Thankfully, the General Assembly passed the Computer Science Promise Program, or CS Promise, in the last budget. CS Promise requires that all Ohio students in grades 7-12 have access to at least one computer science course a year if they choose to take it. However, we are concerned that not enough students and parents know about this option. We are proposing that schools be required to share information about this opportunity with parents in a similar way that College Credit Plus is done each year. Schools would have to share information about CS Promise and the computer science courses offered by the school in writing with students and parents, on the school's website, and at least one informational session per school year.

Some organizations are advocating that computer science be added as a graduation requirement. While we agree with this in principle, we don't believe this is the time to make that change. We think there needs to be a larger conversation over the next year or two about the high school experience and how we make it more effective and relevant for postsecondary and workforce success. We are concerned that if there are changes in this budget and in the next budget, it will confuse schools and students as well as complicate implementation. We ask that the General Assembly make no changes to graduation requirements in this budget.

Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid

Many of the testimonies today mention school funding. It is a complicated topic area with many facets. For example, the budget increases facilities funding for charter schools, which we appreciate. However, Ohio Excels has chosen to focus on one element of the school funding formula during this budget cycle: Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid, or DPIA. Our primary concern with DPIA is the method the state uses to identify how many economically disadvantaged students are enrolled in a given school district.

For years, the state has relied on the National School Lunch Program to help determine this number. However, as the eligibility of that program has changed, the accuracy of how we flag economically disadvantaged students has decreased. As more students of all income levels become eligible for free and reduced priced lunches, the DPIA funds meant for our most needy students are increasingly spread across the state to students who may not be economically disadvantaged. This means that some of our lowest-income districts might receive less DPIA funding over time while other districts with low percentages of economically disadvantaged students are receiving more than their fair share.

We are proposing that the state use a process called direct certification, which uses existing state data to measure the number of economically disadvantaged students in a school district without relying on school lunch program qualification (please note that this change will not impact any element the existing school lunch program). Economically disadvantaged students face many challenges, and we believe it is critical that this funding get to the students who need it the most.

Educator Supply & Demand

Over the past few years, there have been many conversations about teacher shortages and how that affects school staffing and initiatives. We believe that policymakers and stakeholders need a better picture of the staffing needs of schools so that we know where the need is greatest and we can see if programs meant to ease teacher shortages are working. The budget includes new provisions to collect data about school district vacancies. We support this language, but think the state needs some additional elements to provide a full picture of the need. First, we would like there to be a public dashboard with aggregated demand data for stakeholders. Second, we would like the reporting requirement to apply to charter schools and Joint Vocational School Districts. Finally, we believe the data should also be able to answer additional questions:

- Why are positions becoming vacant (e.g., retirement, new position, left for another position, etc.)?
- How many of the positions had candidates apply, but none were selected?
- What is the turnover rate of the school or district?
- When are positions being filled?
- What grade level/band is most required?

Thank you for your time today, and I would be happy to answer questions right after Cassie Palsgrove provides the testimony for the Career-Connected Learning Coalition.